

The DX Bulletin

SPECIAL REPORT

• America's Oldest Weekly Amateur Radio Publication •

Chod Harris VP2ML Editor

DXCC - A Fresh Start?

At their July meeting in Newington, the ARRL Board of Directors approved a motion to study the possible restructuring of the DX Century Club program. Minute 59 reads:

Moved by [Great Lake Division Director] Mr. Wilson: That the DXAC consider the advisability of restructuring DXCC. This group will not be precluded from considering any possibilities, up to and including even a "fresh start" award, replacing the present DXCC, to begin in or before 1994 (the 50th anniversary of the present DXCC.)

If restructured, the award might take any form, but should include:

- 1) Ease in administration, including countries criteria, and
- 2) If the present DXCC is replaced, there should be a closeout period to achieve an additional level of recognition and to receive final confirmations, and
- 3) Opinion of other DXers, particularly those in other nations of the IARU, should be invited.

It is understood that the Board may or may not adopt a restructured award, but is interested in the input of the amateur community as to whether one is desired and the from it should take if implemented.

Progress reports should be made by DXAC 60 days in advance of each Board meeting, with the final report expected by Dec. 31, 1988.

The DXAC started soliciting comments on this possible restructuring immediately. An August 6 news release from DXAC Chairman John Parrott W4FRU reads, in part:

The post World War II DXCC has evolved to its present level over the past 40 years. During that period, there have been many changes in the philosophy of accreditation, verification, criteria, and administration. Viewing the simple manner in which administration of yesterday's DXCC was conducted in contrast with today's rigid interpretation of the rules, has long struck me as a bit unfair to many DXers, who are still, or will be, climbing the DXCC awards ladder. This may well be as good a time as any to consider giving the DXCC a new face.

In conducting the study, the DXAC will consider all aspects of the DXCC including the number and type of awards, accreditation criteria, administration of the awards, operating ethics, country criteria, and the countries list. The big question to be decided is whether the DXCC should continue unchanged, be restructured with a fresh start as was the case in 1945, or provide a transition mechanism to a new DXCC program, without loss of credits for one's present standing in the DXCC. In pursuing this study, the DXAC will ensure that the high standards and prestige of the DXCC are not diminished by any recommended restructuring of the DXCC.

TDXB's Comments

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it." If the present DXCC program "broke?" TDXB sees several flaws with the current system, enough to suggest that a "fresh start" of DXCC is worth serious consideration. Some of these problems are:

Inconsistent administration: over the past 40+ years, the DXCC program has vacillated from approving everything to approving nothing. The "countries" list is a shambles, and there are no well-understood administrative paths for any decisions. Acceptance of some operations and consideration of potential new countries can drag on for years.

Does not promote activity: because it is close-ended, with a rigidly-fixed goal, the DXCC program as it presently stands stifles rather than encourages DX activity. The combination of poor band conditions and increasing numbers of amateurs on the Honor Roll has led to a serious decline in DXing.

Too inflexible: Even if the DXCC administration wanted to use a more liberal interpretation of the rules to accept more operations and countries, the system is too rigid to change.

Of course, the DXCC program has many important aspects that should be preserved in any restructuring. The program enjoys a very high regard throughout the world as the dominant award in the DX field. Contests and other awards use the DXCC list for the backbone of their own lists. Continuous attention to detail and a high standard of quality over the years have earned DXCC that reputation, but that reputation has eroded over the last few years.

TDXB's Preliminary Proposal

To overcome some of the flaws in the present DXCC program while retaining the high integrity of the award, TDXB offers the following suggestions to start you thinking about what DXCC should look like:

1) DXCC should automatically renew every 11 years. Working every active DXCC "country" during an entire sunspot cycle is a real test of DX prowess, while dropping contacts made more than 11 years previous would keep the award current and participants active. Any country without acceptable activity during the previous 11 years would not be a factor in Honor Roll listings. Administratively, this would involve adding the year to the DXCC record, as well as the callsign. Each DXer's 11-year cycle would begin as of the year of his earliest submitted QSL.

2) DXCC needs more flexibility than the present system. There should be a way that marginal or temporary "countries" can be included. With an automatic 11-year cycle, any disputed country could be simply dropped from the list at the end of the cycle. Perhaps a "wild card" submission should be possible each year, so that undocumented (but not illegal) operations can count.

3) Some QSLs should be checked at other than the DXCC desk. The ARRL already permits some awards to be checked at the local level. The ARRL Board passed up a chance to test this idea with the Golden Jubilee DXCC award, for which they will not even require any cards! But GCR (general certificate rules, where two amateurs or the local club certifies the QSLs) should be sufficient for some cards. The DXCC desk could issue a

list of countries whose cards could be locally credited: USA, JA, DL, G, etc. Let the DXCC desk check the toughies, and reduce the multi-month turnaround during peak years or labor shortages. The FCC has enough faith in the integrity of amateurs to let them give the license tests; certainly the ARRL can find a way to trust specific amateurs with the task of checking a few common QSLs.

4) Transition period: TDXB suggests an 11-year phase-out of the present DXCC. In other words, you have one more complete sunspot cycle to work any more countries under the present system, and get the confirmations. After that, any contacts must count for the new award. 11 years is long enough for any DX goal to be achieved, if the countries are on the air.

5) Change the Honor Roll cutoff dates to postmark, not date received at ARRL Hq. A minor point, perhaps, but you wouldn't think so if your Honor Roll submission missed the deadline, even though mailed in plenty of time. That happened this year to a West German DXer. And this despite a one-month delay in publishing the Honor Roll listing.

6) Publish and stick to a philosophy and administrative procedures for accepting operations and potential new countries. The present system swings back and forth with the individual philosophies of the persons on the DXAC and Awards Committee. Does the DX community want more countries and liberal interpretation of the rules? Then state so and establish administrative procedures to see that this philosophy is adhered to. For example, during the July Board meeting, a motion was discussed to establish Standard Operating Procedures for the ARRL Hq. Awards Committee, in an effort to give the DXAC more power and clearly set policy. The motion was tabled, but the point was made that present procedures are too sloppy and too colored by individual opinion to be satisfactory.

There are obviously many more changes and improvements that can be made in DXCC. Some will be universally popular; others will be divisive and hard-fought. Fortunately the League is seeking the advice of the DX community at large in this study, so each and every DXer can express his or her ideas as to the future of the DXCC program.

As mentioned above, the DXAC is moving apace on the study, in an effort to get maximum possible input before the due date of Dec. 1988. Subcommittees are already soliciting opinions on such aspects of DXCC as: Number and kind of awards, Operating ethics and how to enforce them, Accreditation criteria, Country list and criteria, and Administration of DXCC.

So what is your opinion as to any changes that should be made in the DXCC program? Are you in favor of a "fresh start," or relatively minor improvements? If not a fresh start, how can the transition be structured so that no one loses valid DXCC credits?

And remember this is only a study. Nothing may come of it. The Board specifically mentioned that they may not make any changes to DXCC, but they are interested in the opinion of the DX community as to whether they should make changes. This is a rare opportunity for DXers to make their needs and desires known to the Powers That Be.

Think over the possibilities and send your opinions to TDXB and the ARRL (for distribution to the DXAC members.) [To be continued.]
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The 1986 Clipperton DXpedition

as told by Kip Edwards W6SZN, Rusty Epps W6OAT, and Carl Cook AI6V at the Northwest DX Convention.

Five operators boarded the 125' luxury fishing yacht Royal Polaris in San Diego on April 25 for the 22-day DXpedition, with Bob Vallio W6RGG and Wayne Mills N7NG joining the three above. W6OAT was on the air as the boat pulled from the dock, handing out mid-ocean grid squares to avid 2-meter DXers on the mainland. Terry N6CW outfitted Rusty with a TS-700, amp, and antenna for that purpose.

The first stop was the Revilla Gigedo Islands XF4, where the ship spent the next three frustrating days catching bait fish for the tuna fishermen also going to Clipperton. The delay cut into operating time at Clipperton, and was particularly frustrating because the group had applied for permission to operate from XF4 and were turned down. Thanks to the Clipperton DXpeditioners, XF4 is now rarer than Clipperton!

The delay caught the operators in mid-ocean when the CW Armadillo Run started. Frustrated over their inability to actively participate, Armadillo Run coordinators and DXpeditioners W6OAT and N7NG handed out Pacific and Ocean county QSOs to anyone who would work FO0XX/MM.

The frustration continued as Clipperton finally hove into view. The now-familiar sight of the dangerous Clipperton surf breaking all around the island greeted the DXpeditioners. "Like the opening scene of Hawaii Five-0," said one operator. A few crew members of the Royal Polaris tried a landing through the surf, and then were forced to spend the next hour on the island, looking for a break in the waves. One crew member was seriously hurt in the attempt to leave the island, and was laid up for seven days! Getting on and off Clipperton is no picnic.

The group finally landed the next day, and quickly set up two Cushcraft AV-5 verticals to get on the air immediately. They erected two tents for operating and two for sleeping, and eventually consigned all four to famous Clipperton crabs. The crabs would get under the floor of the tent during the day, and would be crushed. Their remains fermented rapidly in the 100+° heat, rendering the tents barely tolerable.

Each operating position was equipped with a Yaesu FT-1, amp, and two fans: one for the amp, and one for the operator. The rigs and Chinese diesel generators performed flawlessly throughout the DXpedition. To improve the signal into Europe, the gang brought along a Cushcraft A-3 tribander, which they fixed on EU. Unfortunately the ubiquitous booby birds gravitated to this shiny new perch, and quickly twisted the elements far out of alignment. [The A-3 element-to-boom mount is simply inadequate to prevent such rotation.—ed.] A Butternut HF2V low-band vertical stuck into the edge of the lagoon provided 160-40 meter operation. The lagoon made an excellent ground, but the salty condensation on the center insulator soon caught fire and burned the insulator through, knocking the antenna off the air.

Among other memorable moments for the DXpeditioners were when W6OAT recommended a walk around the island for the newcomers to Clipperton. The other ops should have known something was up when Rusty stayed behind to operate. The rest of the crew stumbled back to camp hours later: tired, thirsty, and bored. And again this year a helicopter joined the DXpeditioners. A US fishing boat sent its 'copter to Clipperton with fresh food and ice! the rarest commodity on the island. Since they had no landing permission, the helicopter hovered mere inches above the island as its pilot delivered the much-appreciated supplies.

On the sixth day, the captain of the Royal Polaris woke up the DXpeditioners requesting they pack up. The surf was about as calm as it ever is on that wave-swept atoll, so the operators passed on an additional day of radio and departed Clipperton, after 16,000 QSOs. Then began the tedious cruise back to Cabo San Lucas at the southern tip of Baja, and home, 22 days after leaving San Diego.

On Working Europe

One of the major motivations of the 1986 DXpeditioners was to work DXers in Europe and other parts of the world slighted by the 1985 group. That international group of 16 operators were only able to knock Clipperton from 8th to 22th on the VERON European Most Wanted list. The '85 operators attributed this to poor band conditions and too many stateside contacts. "We felt we had left some things undone," stated one op. So with an experienced crew needing minimal supplies, they set out to work EU. Were they successful?

Certainly the 1986 Clipperton crew gave the average DXer in Europe his or her best shot at the island. "We were available to modest stations in Europe on at least one band," described one op. Operators report working into the second and third layer of stations in Finland, Sweden, Greece, and Czechoslovakia.

However, a mere 1800 of their 16000 QSOs were with European stations, almost all those on 20 and 40 CW. 20 SSB contacts with Europeans were very few (119 out of 2985 total 20 SSB). It wasn't through lack of trying. Each operator spend time each day trying to work EU, but, especially on 20 SSB, the Europeans were "their own worst enemy," according to one DXpeditioner. "If the Europeans would have stood by when asked, we could have doubled our rate," another operator lamented. SSB rates in Europe were a contact every three minutes, far less than on CW. "Undisciplined," described another operator. "They wouldn't cooperate."

Meanwhile the crew drew high marks for much of their operation, which included such niceties as working very small frequency splits to let RIT operators make contacts. "Best run DXpedition," said one convention-goer. TDXB agrees.

Letters on DXpeditions

Dear TDXB:

The guys who sit at home and complain about the DXpeditions should try it sometime. Even the 3C0 and PY0 gangs have to be given credit for trying. What do you expect from a bunch of TR8's, of whom only one (TR8JLD) is a proven CW/SSB LF/HF enthusiast? He can't operate all the time. Even K8CW takes breaks!

The Europeans complaining about FO0XX is another peeve here. The CW figures show EU did fine. They should stop complaining about DXCC. Granted it is screwed up on criteria, but it is an ARRL award. They can always go apply for the other societies' versions. They get DXCC for free; US hams have to be ARRL members. Other similar awards [from other groups] usually charge everyone.

(s) Jim Dionne K1MEM

Dear TDXB:

All I wonder is: that you have the sauciness to criticize the 3C0 activity, but up to this day I found no official comment about the dilettante SSB activity from Clipperton.

It could not be that Americans guys are out of any criticism. You are measuring with different scales. Americans must be good; and the rest of the world....

(s) Hans Gobel DK1RV

[Also see Issue 343. -ed.]

When are you going to be on CW/SSB/160/10/OSCAR?

When asked to identify the worst operating practice, their pet peeve, the 1986 Clipperton DXpeditioners replied to a man: those stations that kept asking "When are you going to be on [some other band or mode]?"

"These calls often cover up a report, deprive other stations of a contact, and break the DXpeditioner's concentration," explained one op. It got so bad late in the DXpedition that the operators took to replying, "We're listening for you right now on 1835!"

The FO0XX crew are not the only DXpeditioners who share this pet peeve. 7J1ACH, who alternates CW and SSB every other day, responded to the CW query, "When are you going to be on SSB?" with the response, "Not in your lifetime."

Give the guys a break, and see if the information is available elsewhere before calling the DXpedition station. Catch them at slow times, and provide positive information: "You were loud into NE at 0500 last night. Are you going to be on again tonight?"

And DXpeditioners: take a second to give operating schedules and QSL information; it will save time in the long run.

International Reply Coupons Wanted

TDXB frequently receives calls from DXers looking for IRCs. At \$0.80 each at your local post office, any other source of this unofficial international currency is much appreciated by DXers. TDXB has noted a few outlets for IRCs recently, but demand far exceeds supply (suggesting the price of used IRCs will go up.) Among those offering IRCs for sale are:

- Very High Speed Code club sells IRCs for 8 for 10 DM. Contact D. Hoogma, VHSC Sekretar, Nijmegen, Netherlands.

- Dick Bennett N7CY has offered IRCs at 20 for \$8. 6729 Beach Dr. SW, Seattle, WA 98136.

- Ron Wright ZL1AMO offers IRCs for 100 for \$45. 28 Chorley Ave., Auckland *, New Zealand.

- Andy VE1ASJ has been selling IRCs at \$0.50 Canadian each. Box 51, St. John NB E2L 3X1 Canada.

- Don Search W3AZD often carries IRCs to DX meetings and conventions. He sells them for \$0.37 each, but NO mail orders.

- Or try the QSL manager of any recent DXpedition.

Don't send money without checking ahead first!

Do you know of any source for bulk IRCs? Drop a line to TDXB and we'll spread the word. Thanks.

QSL Cards in Russian

How do you get that elusive Russian QSL card? Notwithstanding the fact that all Russians are required to QSL every contact, those cards can be years in coming. One way to speed the process is to send a QSL card in Russian. Thanks to Tom Frenaye K1KI, editor of USSR Tidbits (Box 62, Unionville CT 06085), such cards are now available. Gerry Hull AK4L, RFD 5 Box 328, Gilford NH 03246, (603) 293-4911 offers both a blank basic card or cards custom printed with your own text, in English or Russian. Prices range up from \$5 for 100 blank cards. Drop Gerry an SASE for more details.

Open Low-Band Frequencies in Africa

Lee N7DF/TT8 suggests the following frequencies offer the best chance for US stations to be heard in Northern Africa in the fall: 3772, 3785, 3799, 7162, 7177-84, 7202-06, and 7227-7230. Avoid VOA 7185-7200.

NEW COUNTRY NEWS

Peter I Island Bob Winters KD7P will be in the vicinity of Peter I Island for a couple of days around Christmas. He'll be travelling on the world's most powerful non-nuclear ice breaker, the 400' USCGC Polar Sea, which can break through ice up to 35' thick. The ship is fully equipped with helicopters to reduce landing problems, and Bob has successfully negotiated a landing attempt with the ship's captain. He has even heard that Norway has granted him a license. Bob has plenty of experience in DXpeditions, including a operation from Midway Island that set a new record in WPX.

So what's the catch? Landing permission from the Norwegians. For a country's claim to an island to hold up in international courts, that country must eventually land on the island and make some kind of "improvements." No Norwegian has set foot on this isolated Antarctic island since 1929, and the Norwegian State Department is concerned that a major landing by a unit of the US military (the Coast Guard is a branch of the military) would establish the basis for a US claim of Peter I. This is exactly what happened with Clipper-ton, for example. The US claimed the island, but France landed on and "improved" the island, and the French claim eventually prevailed!

Why does anyone give a flying hoot about an ice-covered rock in the middle of nowhere? Fishing rights and possible under-sea mineral wealth in a 200-mile-wide "economic zone" around the island are worth millions of dollars.

Will Norway permit the "military invasion" of Peter I for the sake of a New Country? The odds are against it, but this represents our best shot yet at this potential new DXCC country. **TDXB** will keep you posted.

Vienna International Centre The gang at 4U1VIC refuse to call it quits on their quest for New One status. Despite the failure of the ARRL Board of Directors to intervene in their behalf, VIARC Vice President John Oakberg NK4N says "We're still upbeat. We're all incurable optimists." Both John and President Dick Olsen K7AWD say they are continuing their efforts to win approval as a separate DXCC "country."

Meanwhile Yaesu is going ahead with its donation of a 767 transceiver to the 4U1VIC station. **Operating hint:** the best time to look for 4U1VIC is during local lunch: 11-1200Z in the summer, an hour later in the winter. 14030 and 14200-220 are favorite spots. Guest operators man major contests (the station does count as a separate multiplier in WAE and CQWW contests.) WAE SSB, All Asian CW, and both modes of CQWW will see 4U1VIC on the air. QSL to VIARC, P.O.Box 200, A-1000 Vienna, Austria. Include the name of the operator, if possible, for, as with many club stations, each operator is responsible for his or her own QSLs. Two IRCs will return your QSL with colorful UN stamps, which are an important part of the station's claim to separate country status!

North Korea A legitimate, documented operation from North Korea would undoubtedly count as a New One. (Even Don Search and the DXAC can't say North and South Korea are one and the same country!) North Koreans are very active in fox-hunting and are struggling to improve their technology. Amateur radio is a logical next step. So when a station signing P5AJG showed up on 7001 at 0930Z July 1, DXers sat up and listened. The operator gave his address as Box 126, Huengnam, North Korea, and quickly disappeared. Probably Slim, but you never know.

North Korea is bucking for some of the 1988 Summer Olympics, and many of the Olympic technicians and support staff are amateurs. Maybe P5 in '88?

EQUIPMENT NOTES

Phase Noise in the Kenwood TS-940S

Dear **TDXB**:

I have been following your reports on the 930/40 phase noise problem with great interest. It's very refreshing that you've brought it out in the open without the apparent pressures on magazine tests which may be subject to advertising intimidation. [My experience at ARRL Hq. suggests that is not true at **QST**. -ed.]

I tried discussing the problem with Kenwood representatives at the Visalia DX Convention this past April. The JA factory representative told me that "It's a very difficult problem and maybe it will be solved in the future." Mr. Morton KR6T [Customer Service Manager for Kenwood] told me that he was not aware of any problem, I live between a 930 and a 940, and as a 930 user myself, I can tell you it's pretty bad. While no quantitative measurement data is known, I feel that the 940 is the worse of the two. In two definitive tests by competent operators, W6RR and W4CG, both using A-B tests, the 940 was definitely the worse offender.

In another case involving an early 930, the CW phase noise was 7 kHz wide at a distance of 12 miles. Later serial numbers apparently do not exhibit this syndrome in two other tests with the same power and beam headings. Therefore I believe that there is a wide variation in this pestilence. My conclusion is that the problem is wide-spaced, sometimes unrecognized, and often tolerated. The manufacturers (not only Kenwood) are unwilling to step up to it as yet.

G3OSS should be complimented for his positive work in this area and Kenwood should life it head from the sand and minimize the problem, as it is impossible to totally eliminate it. It appears that Kenwood must labor under the delusion that amateurs don't communicate...especially regarding equipment problems, hi!

Pleased keep up the good work and turn up the burners.

(s) Marv Gonior W6FR

Dear **TDXB**:

The February 1986 issue of **QST** reported the blocking dynamic range of the Kenwood TS-940S to be 138-141 dB (measured at 20 kHz separation per Dec. 1985 **QST**.) Incidentally, Jan. 1985 **QST** reported the blocking dynamic range of the ICOM IC-751 to be "noise limited." I interpret this to mean phase noise limited. Yet the 751 gets high marks for low phase noise on transmit and the 940S apparently flunks. Why? Also, Jan. 1984 **QST** reported the blocking dynamic range of the TS-930 to be "noise limited." Will; someone please explain this?

Maybe if we keep this going we'll get to the bottom of it! I interpret the **QST** data to mean that 940S has lower phase noise than the 751 or 930S when measured with signals separated by 20 kHz.

(s) Ted Kroenert KA1PL

Dear **TDXB**:

My Kenwood TS-930 went out again and I have written a letter to Kenwood about it. If they don't do something to remedy the situation, I am really going to start a campaign to get the League behind the people like myself and many others who have had nothing but problems with the rig and their haughty attitude about it.

K1EIC and K1EIR [very active traffic handlers] have a 940 that Kenwood would not fix until they got a lawyer involved.

(s) Ralph Hirsch K1RH